

## Habitat Screening for Utility Projects

Endangered resources surveys or inventories have been completed for only a very small portion of the state. Yet we know that Wisconsin is biologically diverse with large areas that remain relatively unaffected by development. As a result, the data files contained within the NHI database and our knowledge about endangered resources within the state are incomplete.

The Endangered Resources review will provide NHI results in the form of a list of species found within or near the project area and a brief description of the habitat for those species. However, because the database is incomplete, other species may be present in the project area or species identified near the project area may also be present within the project area if suitable habitat exists, i.e., absence of evidence is not evidence of absence of a species. Therefore, as important as the NHI results are for the Endangered Resources review, it is also important to know whether suitable habitat for any of these species occurs within or adjacent to the project area.

For project applicants that do not have a License Agreement, the Endangered Resources review may include a request to complete a habitat screening for the species identified from the NHI or other sources to determine if suitable habitat is present. If a utility already has access to the complete NHI database through a License Agreement, they can complete the habitat screening prior to submitting information for the ER review. In some cases, such as in developed areas with only historical occurrences or areas with rare aquatic species where project actions will not affect waterways, the screening may not be necessary.

The habitat screening should be provided in a tabular format with a minimum of the following information:

- Project Segment or Alternative
- Species Name
- Common Name
- Federal or State Status
- Preferred Habitat (*brief* description of natural community types, dominant species, host plants for invertebrate species, structure, moisture conditions, hydrology, or other important habitat elements for the species)
- Habitat Present (*brief* description of the extent and quality of habitat at or adjacent to the site relative to important habitat elements for the species of interest)
- Is Suitable Habitat Present (yes/no/uncertain)

Habitat screening can usually be completed through analysis of a combination of aerial surveys, USGS quads, and walking surveys. The screening results should be accompanied by a brief description of the methodology and a map or some other means of geographically referencing survey locations in cases where only a portion of the project area is surveyed due to access limitations or the size of the project.